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Review Of "Encouraging Early Literacy: An Integrated Approach To Reading And Writing In N-3" By J. I. Schwartz

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Recommended Citation

Donna Jo Napoli. (1989). "Review Of "Encouraging Early Literacy: An Integrated Approach To Reading And Writing In N-3" By J. I. Schwartz". *Language*. Volume 65, Issue 3. 678-678. DOI: 10.2307/415268
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-linguistics/135>

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Linguistic Society of America

Review

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Source: *Language*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Sep., 1989), p. 678

Published by: [Linguistic Society of America](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/415268>

Accessed: 21-07-2015 13:44 UTC

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the change and thus contribute to our general understanding of the interaction of syntax and semantics. We eagerly await further solid, empirical studies of the development of English syntax in the period 1700–1900 resulting from the project out of which this work has sprung. [THOMAS F. SHANNON, *University of California, Berkeley.*]

Encouraging early literacy: An integrated approach to reading and writing in N–3. JUDITH I. SCHWARTZ. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988. Pp. ix, 262. \$17.50.

Judith Schwartz, in her superb book, argues that it is possible to have early reading programs based on play and creativity and ordinary language use rather than rote. Furthermore, she claims that this sort of reading program is essential for the emerging reader, whether that reader is 3 or 5 or 8. Let the reader beware who has never tried to teach a classroom of children to read: Schwartz's claim is by no means uncontroversial. Rote and phonics are alive and well, and many veteran teachers swear by them. Other teachers try several methods at once, going with 'whatever works' for each child. Nevertheless, I urge readers to consider the alternative Schwartz presents us—partly because the educational philosophy is attractive, but mostly because Schwartz goes that crucial step farther and shows us exactly what such a reading program should look like, complete with lists of well-thought-out child-centered activities at the end of each chapter. If the reader wants to give this method a shot, it's easy to follow the directions.

Schwartz approaches the issue of reading holistically. She gives an overview of major psychological approaches to cognitive development. She gives a linguistically accurate overview of oral and written language systems. She offers a good healthy discussion of language diversity, where she sets aside all issues of politics and states frankly that language development in the classroom should build on children's strengths in their native languages. She supplements this chapter with an appendix on characteristics of Black Vernacular English. Schwartz dares to get into that sticky question of what makes a good test, and she points out pitfalls to avoid. She gives numerous verbatim

dialogues between children and between children and adults (many of which could serve as input data for other studies of language acquisition), pointing out issues of language development. She talks about the value of dictating stories, of sustained silent reading, of finding poetry around us (as in, for example, reorganizing the words of a magazine ad into lines of poetry), of choral reading, and of offering the child quality reading materials. This last point is not one to be taken lightly: if we give children uninteresting, poorly-written reading materials, why should they go through the effort of finishing the reading assignment?

The book is clearly written, well-organized, and rich in information and suggestions for classroom and home activities. The author gives sensible advice in a straightforward, honest manner. She doesn't hesitate to give her opinion on controversial issues, and her opinion is intelligent and based on years of experience. I came away with the definite impression that this author is wise.

The motivating philosophy of the book is that children are more likely to become literate if their contact with all language is meaningful. Typically, our contact with oral language is meaningful—we learn words because we need and want to communicate; we hear words because others need and want to communicate with us. But our early contact with written language may consist of lists of arbitrary symbols to memorize (A, B, C, ...) or of words that are unrelated to each other in meaning (*bat, cat, sat, hat, ...*). If, instead, we offer children meaningful contact with written language right from the start, there's a better chance that children will gain mastery of written language. What evidence does Schwartz present for her contention? No statistics jump out at the reader. But the fact that illiteracy is high in our country means we can't afford not to listen. And the program presented in this book is humane and creative.

This is an excellent book for anyone interested in literacy, the processes of reading, oral and written language, and early education in general. [DONNA JO NAPOLI, *Swarthmore College.*]

Word order rules. By ANNA SIEWIERSKA. London: Croom Helm, 1988. Pp. ix, 304. \$65.00.